

Metacognition as an Essential Reading Strategy

Teacher Preparation

Renee noticed that her students were struggling to piece together information and ideas in their texts in order to draw conclusions. She also saw that many in the class wanted the answers to appear before them with little or no effort on their parts. She felt like she could perhaps address these two observations, if she could simply make a fun, but powerful point about the importance of using specific strategies when readers approach an assignment. This would help her students use their thinking and inferencing skills for finding answers when they weren't directly given in the text.

To focus her planning, Renee asked herself the following questions:

- How can I lend a sense of concreteness to the mental process of connecting different bits of information together to draw a conclusion?
- Where in their lives do students connect different clues, or pieces of information, to reveal the whole?
- What can I use to jumpstart each student's thinking process?

After giving some serious thought to the answers, she decided that the most logical first step was to actually model the thinking process for her students. Given her questions, she decided that one tangible and intriguing visual could be a jigsaw puzzle, something that both children and adults like. After a little searching, she found a twelve-piece puzzle that her young daughter had always enjoyed; this would be a springboard for student thinking, discussion, and interaction.

Renee concluded her planning by actually putting the puzzle together in the stillness of her classroom, mentally practicing both that portion of the lesson and her follow-up reading activity. With that done, she put the puzzle away, gathered some colored index cards, checked the number of reading books that she needed, and anticipated the next day's fun!

Activity Starter

Renee invited her students to gather around her, intriguing them with a few clues about the activity that was to follow. Curiosities aroused, they eagerly formed a circle and watched her as she began to piece together the puzzle.

She asked her students to observe her carefully, and she talked out loud to herself about her thinking process as she began to fit the pieces into place. She used sentences like, "I want to start by locating the edge pieces, then the corner pieces," and "Now I am looking for a piece that will fit in this spot."

Once the puzzle was complete, she asked her students to discuss what skills and strategies she had used. Students noted such things as "thinking of the puzzle as a whole piece first," and "searching for something you know is there but you just can't see yet." Renee had a student write these skills on the overhead as his colleagues called them out and the others agreed to their accuracy.